

PRIORITIES FROM THE COALFACE

UK & IRELAND
PLACE PRACTITIONER
RESEARCH

2025 Report

CONTENTS

Executive Summary	X
Section 1	
Introduction	X
Section 2	
Survey analysis	XX
2.1 Survey respondents	XX
2.2 Challenges identified	XX
2.3 Key concerns	XX
2.4 Current sources of support	XX
2.5 Required support areas	XX
2.6 Possible support from The Place Coalition	XX
Section 3	
Practitioner Workshop	XX
3.1 Attracting more home workers	XX
3.2 Better access to best practice	XX
3.3 More effective signposting to supplier support	XX
3.4 Better support with collaboration and networking	XX
3.5 Mental health support	XX
Section 4	
Next steps	XX

Led by The Place Coalition, and supported by the Association of Town & City Management, 2025.

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The Association of Town and City Management is delighted to support The Place Coalition on this key piece of research. The report – outlining a range of key current thoughts from town and city centre practitioners – is a critical piece of intelligence much needed by the ATCM. The intended annual review of these priorities from the coalface will allow continuing improvements to the industry and benefits for our members.

**Ojay McDonald, Chief Executive Officer,
Association of Town & City Management**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Place Coalition, with the support of the **Association of Town & City Management**, undertook research in order to better understand the needs of the place management industry.

Research data was collated in two stages; the first stage was an online survey of **65** practitioners during **April 2025**, which was then followed by a workshop of **40** delegates at the ATCM Summer School in **June 2025**.

These two elements delivered the following key findings.



Almost half reporting stable or increased pedestrian numbers within the past 3 years



Key concerns around security, business retention and funding



Support required towards increasing both local spend and dwell time

A particular theme of the research has been to identify the support which practitioners require to take the management of their places to the next level, and this is examined in detail within this document. By way of a headline summary, the following identifies both the key issues identified by practitioners and, in each case, the most commonly identified solution.

Issue	Solution
How can place managers attract more home workers to their locations?	Focused discounts from town or city centre providers, to include factors such as lunch or the cost of car parking.
How can place managers access examples of best practice more easily?	A robust shared online repository of best practice, with an effective search facility.
How can place managers be more effectively signposted to the supplier support they may need?	An online system for place practitioners to provide recommendations regarding suppliers.
How can place managers be better supported with collaboration and networking?	More frequent regional face to face meetings.
Given the pressures associated with the role, how can a mental health support network be created for place managers?	An online, monthly forum, to provide a confidential and safe opportunity to discuss shared issues.

This report is intended to become a definitive annual snapshot position statement on the views of industry practitioners regarding both the challenges they face and the solutions they are seeking.

About The Place Coalition

The Place Coalition is a collective of award-winning businesses, all of whom provide advice, guidance and support to the place management industry. Each constituent business is comprised of experts in their field, with embedded experience of place management, either as practitioners, suppliers, or both. Membership of The Place Coalition is restricted to organisations who have proven themselves in the delivery of excellent services and who demonstrate an approach to work collaboratively in reinvesting a proportion of their time and resources into key place management industry projects, such as this report, at no cost. To discover how The Place Coalition can support you location, please visit www.theplacecoalition.co.uk



Our location means that we are far from central in terms of the geography of the UK and being able to share and participate in projects such as this allows us to both share common issues and make recommendations for future industry improvements.

Adrian Watson, Chief Executive Officer, Aberdeen Inspired

SECTION 1

INTRODUCTION

The Place Coalition has been supported by the ATCM in undertaking research to better understand the needs of the place management industry. The research data was provided by town and city centre management practitioners and was derived from two main sources:

1. An open online survey, which ran between **17th and 30th April 2025**, and which was designed to assess the current challenges facing practitioners, whilst also identifying their key support priorities.
2. A delegate workshop, which formed part of the ATCM 2025 Summer School and was aimed at gaining the cutting-edge thoughts from Town and City Centre Managers and BIDs regarding the industry – in particular around the support they currently require to take the management of their places to the next level.

The findings of the research are summarised within this report and provide a definitive position statement on the views of industry practitioners on the challenges they face and the solutions they are seeking.



Gaining feedback from practitioners such as myself is a very important part of the ongoing development of the place management industry and I welcomed the opportunity to provide input.

Jill Farnsworth, Chief Executive, MyMiltonKeynes BID

SECTION 2

SURVEY ANALYSIS

The following section outlines headline information regarding the survey respondents, the key challenges they have identified and the possible support measures which are considered to be required.

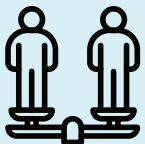
2.1 Survey respondents



A total of 65 responses were received to the survey



Almost 70% of survey respondents represented BIDs



Approximately 50:50 split of respondents from places with a population of more or less than 50,000 people

2.2 Challenges identified

An ongoing challenge for respondents is the drop in footfall they have witnessed in their town or city, with approximately **56%** reporting a drop in pedestrian numbers within the past 3 years. However, this figure should be considered within the context that almost half of respondents are therefore reporting either static or increased numbers.

The latter statistic therefore rails against the popularised notion that our places are in a freefall of decline, and these findings are considered to be particularly robust given that over **80%** of respondents measure footfall and visitor numbers, with the data therefore driven by fact, rather than perception.

A key finding was that respondents identified remote/hybrid working as being as significant a challenge for their town or city as economic factors, and more significant than online shopping. We would highlight the following key question for further consideration.

How can place managers be supported to adapt some of their activities to attract more home workers to their locations during any given week?

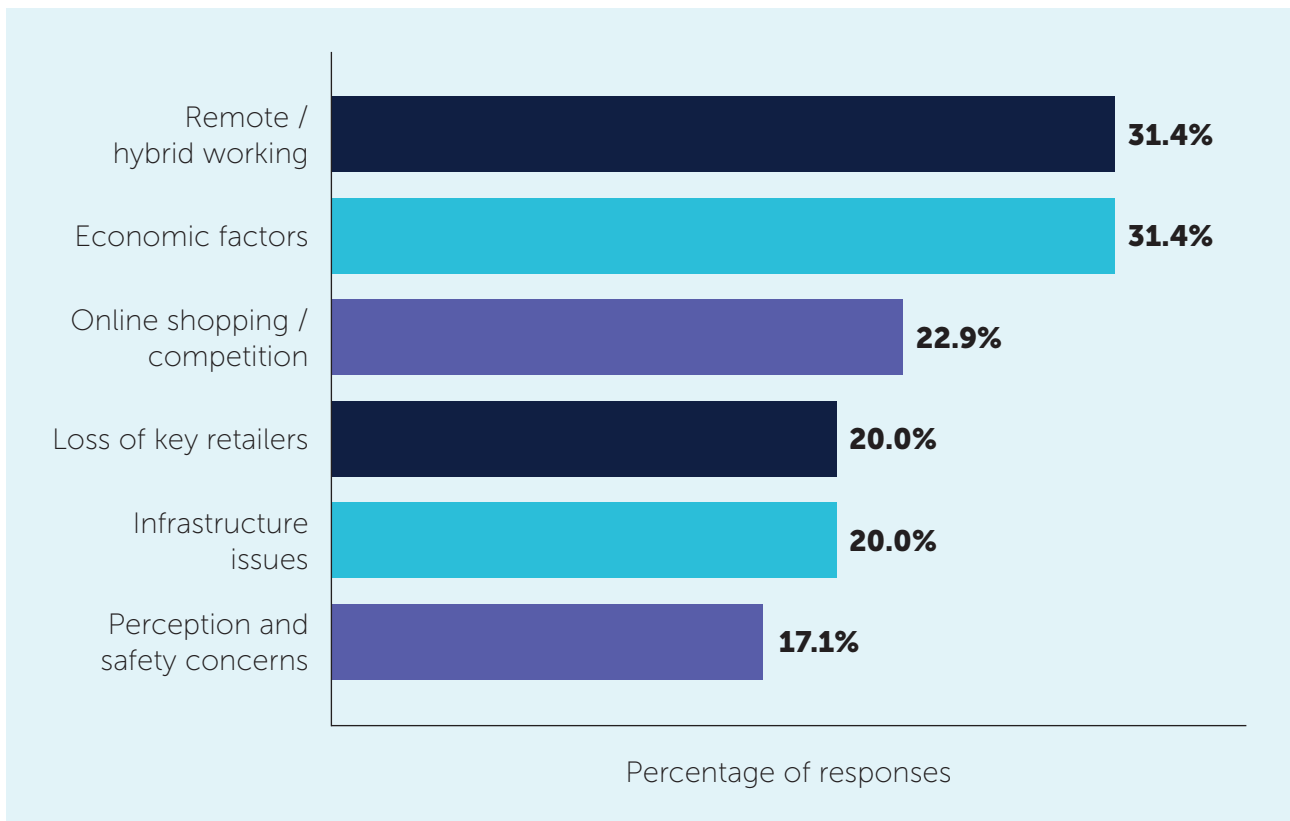


Figure 1: Main factors considered to be impacting on changes in footfall.

2.3 Key concerns

Whilst the decline in footfall is a key concern, it is important to highlight that **44%** of respondents reported stable or increasing footfall. The main factor identified as supporting footfall is town or city centre events, and the following table indicates that events are considered as having almost twice the positive impact on footfall as the nearest other factors.

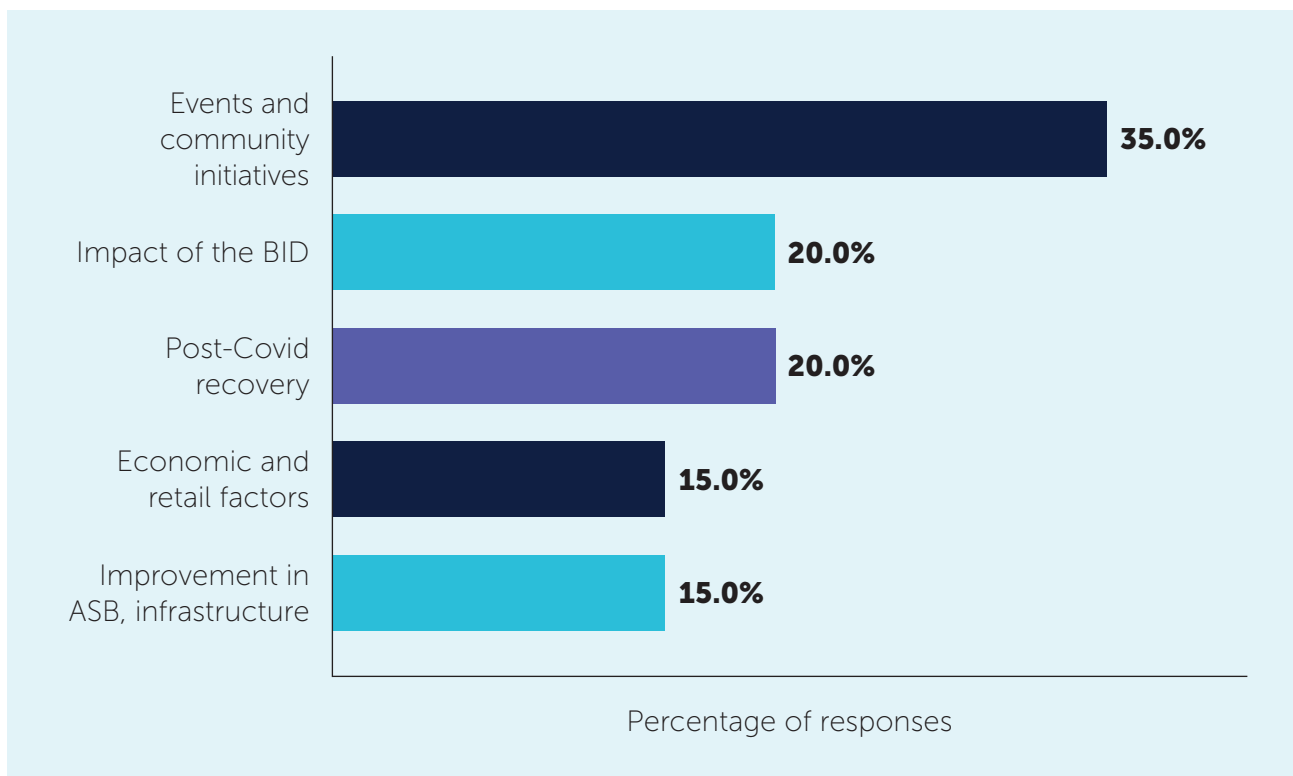


Figure 2: Why respondents believe footfall has increased or stayed stable.

Current concerns, however, remain relatively high amongst survey respondents, with the following priority issues being identified, and resulting in the following question for further consideration.

How can place managers more easily access examples of best practice, in order to better understand and address the key issues they face within their towns and cities?

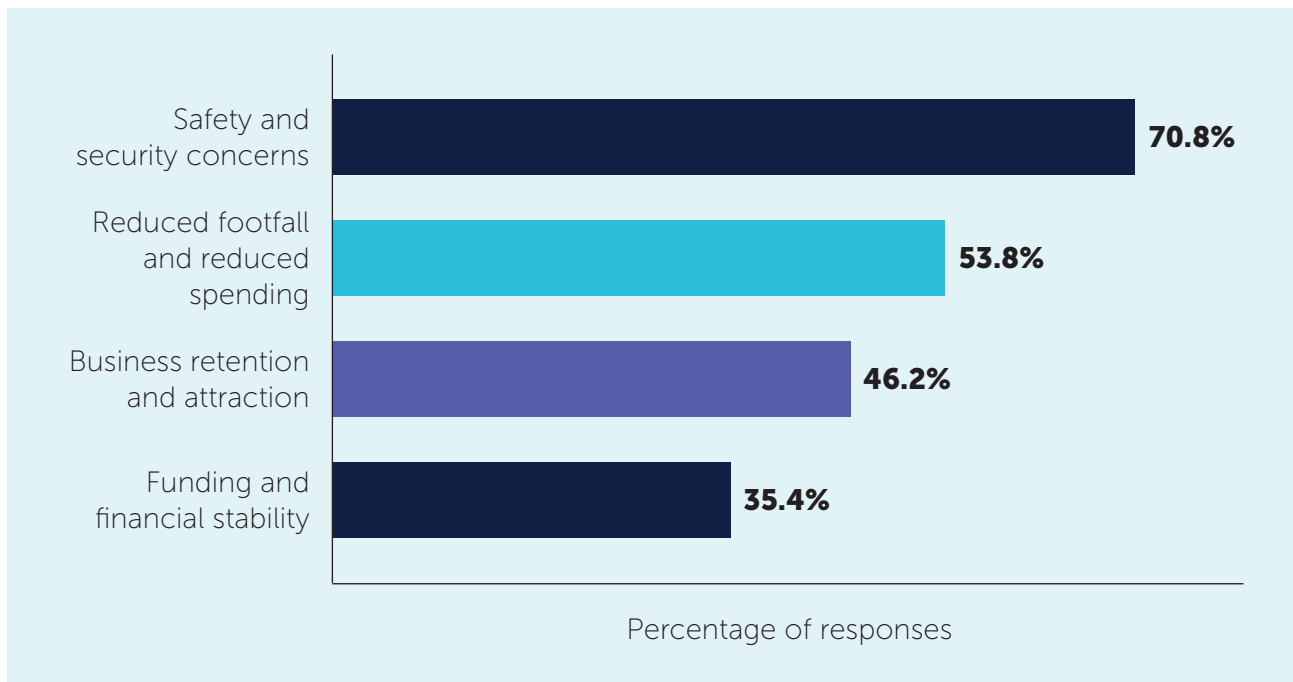


Figure 3: Main current place practitioner concerns.

2.4 Current sources of support

Survey respondents currently gain support from a range of sources, and the following identifies the organisations or networks which they currently rely upon for support in their role. Given that a range of sources are referenced, the following question has been identified for further consideration.

Is there a need for better overall coordination of the support provided to place managers?

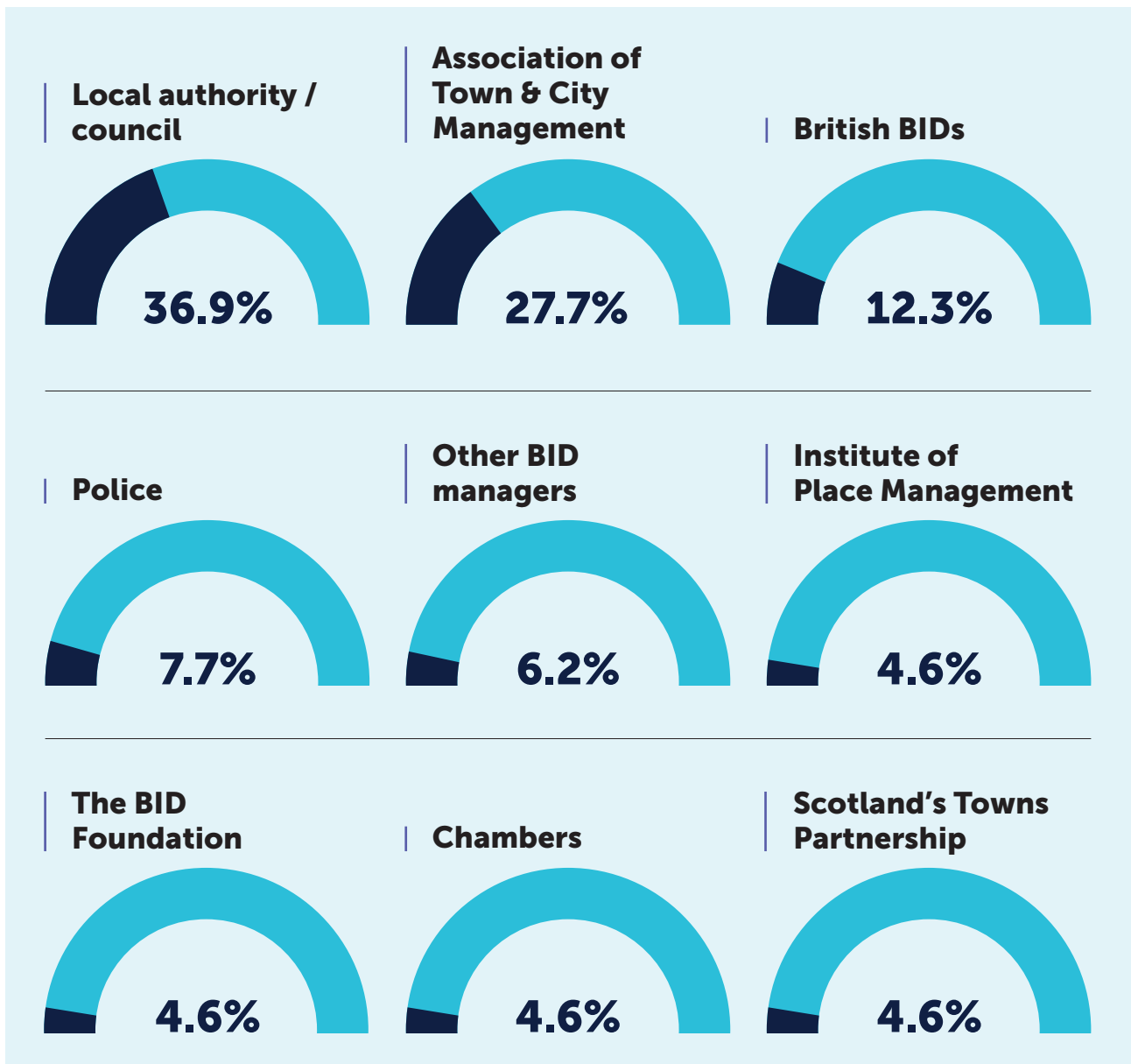


Figure 4: Sources of main areas of support currently provided to place practitioners.

2.5 Required support areas

Respondents currently require support with a range of activities and have identified the following as the priority areas required for more effective place management in their town or city, alongside a desire to gain both access to best-practice case studies and to data insights regarding their town or city. It is considered that this gives rise to the following key question.

How can place managers be better signposted to and advised on the most effective support for their current requirements?

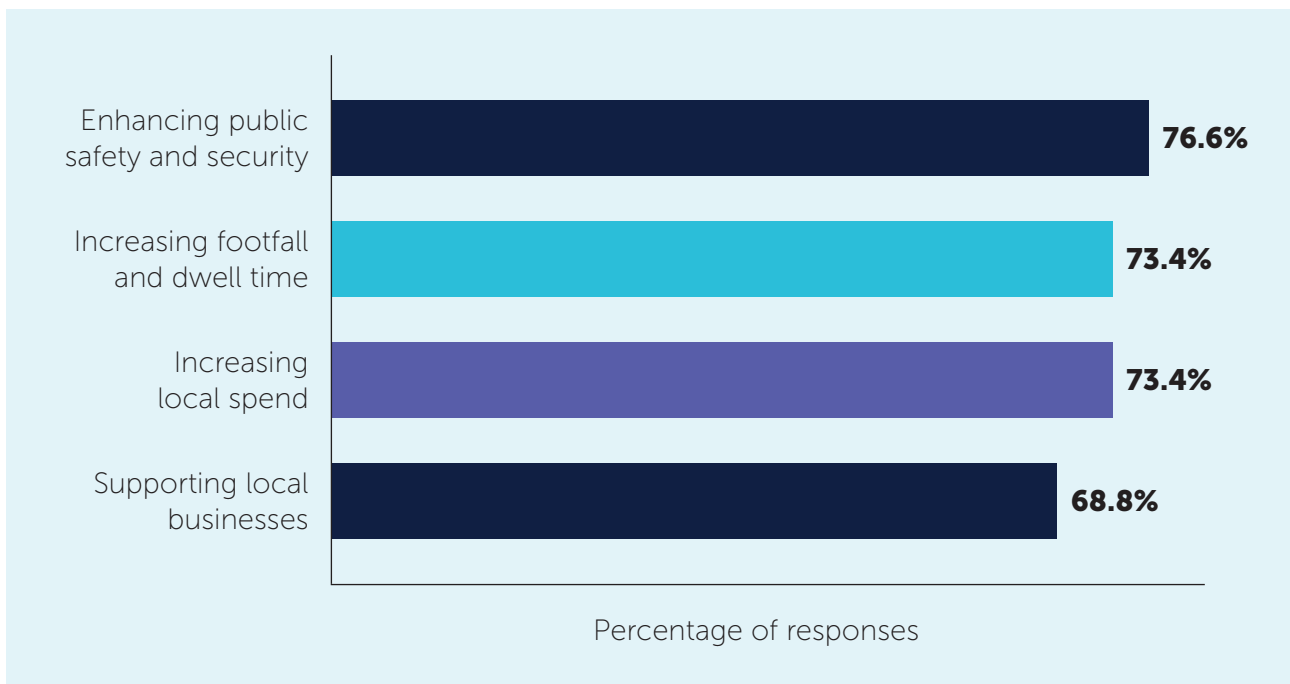


Figure 5: Main current areas identified as requiring further support.

2.6 Possible support from The Place Coalition

The survey included a question regarding any support which respondents considered that The Place Coalition could provide to them, and the major request was around collaboration and networking, which is considered to give rise to the following key question.

How could The Place Coalition support better collaboration and networking between place managers?



We were delighted to participate in a process which allowed us to share our experiences with those of the wider UK place management network.

Tom Hardy, Town Centre Manager, Hitchin BID

SECTION 3

PRACTITIONER WORKSHOP

The survey results were reinforced via a delegate workshop as part of the ATCM Summer School, in **June 2025**, which provided approximately **40** delegates, who were predominantly place practitioners, with the opportunity to further explore the support they consider to be required. The following summarises the main results of this interactive session.

3.1 How can place managers attract more home workers to their locations?

Delegates indicated a range of possible measures which could be deployed towards this key aim and these included both measures which place managers, such as those running BIDs could influence and those which would require buy-in and intervention from organisations within both the private and public sectors. The following are the key actions identified and are shown in order of priority, and it should also be noted that delegates considered that any activities would require communication and promotion focused on home workers.

- 

1 Focused discounts from town or city centre providers, to include factors such as lunch or the cost of car parking
- 

2 The provision of more hotdesking working space within town and city centres
- 

3 Activities and experiences to entice visits from home workers, including organised walks and events
- 

4 Encourage town centre food and beverage businesses to accommodate more agile working during their currently quieter hours

Figure 5: Main suggested actions for attracting a higher number of home workers.

3.2 How can place managers access examples of best practice more easily?

Delegates were clear on the approaches towards better awareness of best practice and, whilst this included a relatively predictable skew towards the use of smarter technology, there was also a feeling that face to face interactions are still viewed very importantly. Whilst there was certain support for the ATCM Basecamp system, there was recognition that it is somewhat limited, and that the adoption of smarter systems is likely to be required. The following key suggestions are shown in order of perceived priority.

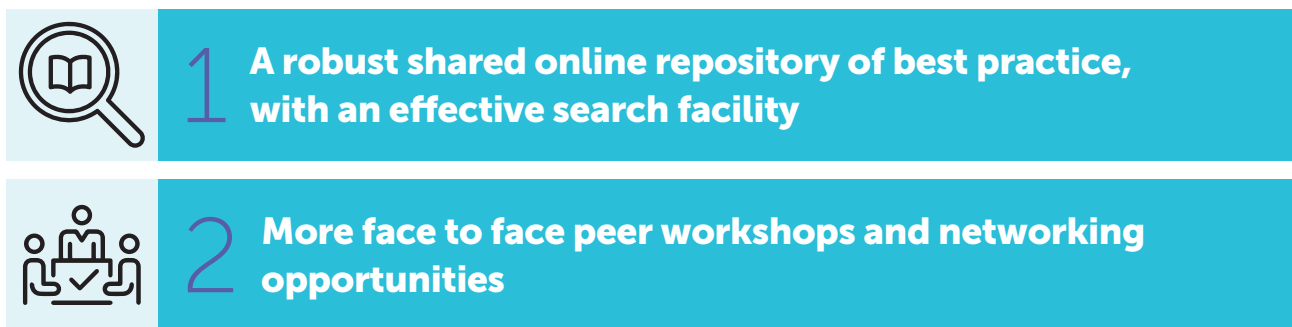


Figure 6: Main suggested actions for attracting a higher number of home workers.

3.3 How can place managers be more effectively signposted to the supplier support they may need?

Delegates highlighted several possible signposting measures to establish the supplier support they require and, it is important to note that there was a general feeling that the actions identified may need to be enacted independently from the industry bodies. The following key suggestions are shown in order of identified priority.



Figure 7: Main suggested actions for attracting a higher number of home workers.

3.4 How can place managers be better supported with collaboration and networking?

Delegates highlighted several possible signposting measures to establish the support they require and there is a strength of feeling for both regional meetings and for peer support, to include larger schemes acting in a mentoring role to smaller ones. The following key suggestions are shown in order of identified priority.

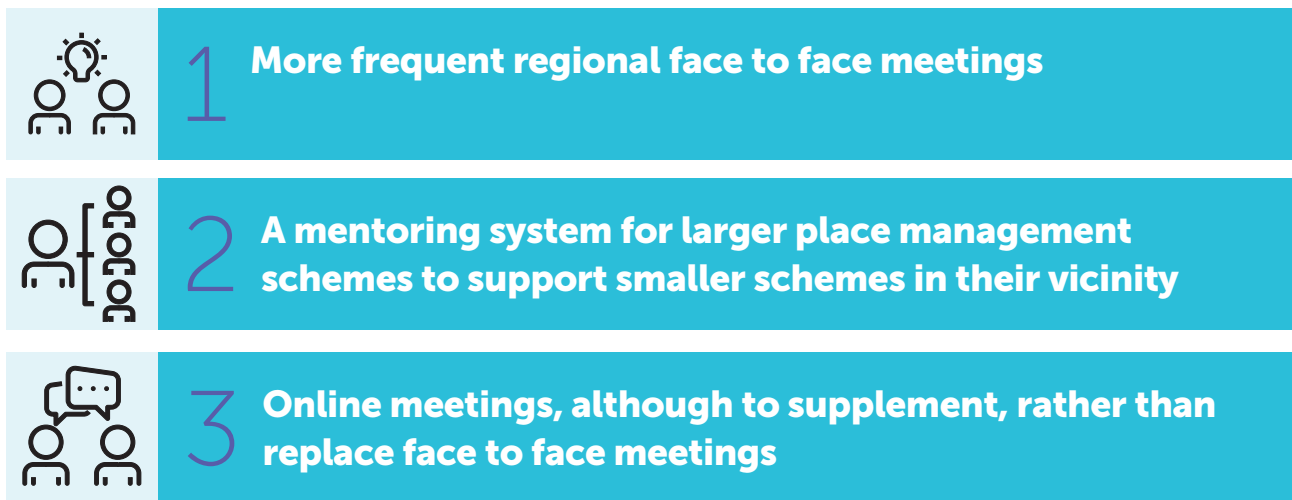


Figure 8: Main suggested actions for attracting a higher number of home workers.

3.5 Given the pressures associated with the role, how can a mental health support network be created for place managers?

Delegates strongly welcomed this notion, with some adding notes of caution regarding the need to ensure that any system should preserve the confidentiality of any issues discussed, whilst it was also considered that this should possibly also incorporate the ability for issues to be highlighted anonymously. The following key suggestions are shown in order of identified priority.



Figure 9: Main suggested actions for attracting a higher number of home workers.



As one of the central Birmingham BIDs, we already share a degree of best practice with surrounding place management schemes, although this project has allowed us to compare and contrast our experiences with those of the national network.

Michele Wilby, Chief Executive Officer, Colmore Business District

SECTION 4

NEXT STEPS

The research has identified a range of issues which have been directly identified by place practitioners and all of the following are subsequently proposed:

1. The Place Coalition will distribute the report to the key UK industry bodies, including **ATCM, British BIDs, Northern Ireland BIDs, Scotland's Towns Partnership, Scotland's Improvement Districts** and **The BID Foundation** and facilitate a discussion between all parties regarding the issues highlighted.
2. The report will be published on The Place Coalition website for viewing by all place practitioners, and other interested parties.
3. The survey and workshop will be repeated in **2026** to allow both progress to be monitored and further key practitioner issues to be explored.

It is therefore intended that this report will become the definitive annual industry benchmark for both the key concerns and required areas of support identified by place practitioners.

The Place Coalition would like to thank the ATCM for their support with this research, as well as both the respondents to the survey of place practitioners and the delegates at the 2025 Summer School workshop. Without the invaluable feedback from the survey and workshop, this report would simply not have been possible.

The Place Coalition members

